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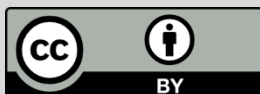
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The book *Visual Participatory Arts Based Research In The City: Ontology, Aesthetics And Ethics*, edited by Laura Trafí-Prats and Aurelio Castro-Varela is an invitation in the form of a catalogue of experiences, projects, and practices that operates as a sample of what was or is happening in a city around the world (Barcelona, Vancouver, Salvador, Salt, Milwaukee, or Manchester...), but could also happen. That's it: it is a catalogue of past descriptions but also an openness of possible futures.

This invitation is specially addressed to those who conceive of and inhabit the city in a "traditional" way, as a human settlement whose urban infrastructure (administrative, political, economic...) differs from rural centres, with a predominance of commercial, industrial, and service activities. From this vision, contemporary cities, in the heat of the machinery of the industrial revolution, became socio-economic attractors of rural populations in search of prosperity derived from modern development. The deployment of technical infrastructures such as transport systems, drinking, or wastewater, lighting, etc. materialized an urban planning approach where the city, even today, tends to operate as a stage for just human activity, thus privileging the development of human habitability over any other agent. The correlation between the growth and expansion of the economy concentrated in the cities and the very limits, scale and urban layout of the city itself, justified the domination of all non-human beings and elements that occupied its confines and peripheries.

Against the backdrop of this city's conception, inherited from modernity but still in force, Trafí-Prats and Castro-Varela's book joins a tradition of work that connects urban studies with STS (Social Studies of Science and Technology) to problematize this idea of the city as a stage for just human activity and to think of it (and inhabit it) as a semiotic-material assemblage made up of a heterogeneity of elements, both human and non-human, that blur the distinction

between background and form, between stage and action, in order to break with human exceptionalism, centrality, and privilege.

This work, however, proposes an approach that is not so common in the field of urban STS studies. The contributions of all the fourteen authors who participate in the work are based on and draw from visual and participatory artistic research. This way, despite the fact that we can find some inspiring transdisciplinary incursions in art inside STS along with some Latour's works (2005, 2002) and his collaboration with different artists (Aït-Touati), curators (Weibel) and formats (exhibitions, scripts...), this book means an inspiring and questioning work that helps to expand and enrich the disciplinary limits of STS tradition. This book not only helps renewing the methods by which we (could) explore and inhabit the city – beyond the discursive and textual ones, but also those based on the technical and academic expertise – but all the visual, artistic, corporeal and community experiences that it compiles through the eight chapters and epilogue also contributes to renewing the ontological, aesthetic, and ethical dimensions of the city. Through community and participatory art, we can materialize and make tangible some common urban issues that are closely connected with what a city is (or could be) and what it is made up of; with how it is inhabited, perceived and experienced; and with how we relate to it and to those natural-cultural "others" who co-inhabit it. Thus, all the experiences collected in the book operate as experimental devices that evidence and problematize disputing, the urban "matters", the city's limits, its visions and occultations, or the "distribution of the sensible" (Rancière, 2009) in the city, which is also, by extension, the distribution and (re)distribution of the habitable.

From empirical-conceptual braids that attempt to distil or apply notions of social and philosophical thought FROM and TO artistic practices and everyday explorations, this book re-defines and re-enables the city and the way

we experience it in four main aspects, some of which (the first two) are more in line with urban STS (Fariás & Sánchez-Criado, forthcoming), and the last two, more original and specific to the artistic field. Very briefly:

1. Cities as a more-than-human assemblage (impossible to reduce to human action) made up of relational entities that emerge in the action itself, as Actor-Network Theory has already been arguing. The city, far from being an anthropocentric settlement, with a clearly defined and reified identity, exportable as a “model” to other cities, operates more as an event or occasion, as an ontological choreography that overflows any attempt of universality and fixity. The city would rather be a situated pluriverse in which forms of existing and inhabiting it are continually contested and emerging.

2. Cities as the operators but also results of distributed agencies between humans and non-humans, between objects, people, and infrastructures. Hence, the city is not the material background of human subjectivities and their actions, thus reproducing the dichotomy between subjects and objects, but rather post-human aesthetic ecology where objects and spaces affectively mediate (affect and are affected) between past, present, and future times. This also implies displacing discourse and language as the primary form of thought, and incorporates the visual and material, the objectual, in an urban phenomenology that makes tangible oppressions and resistances that remained hidden from traditional technocratic urban planning and expertise.

3. Cities as a contested notion, territory and geography that, far from being solely configured from above, from technical solutionist and technocratic political planning that reproduces coloniality and neoliberalism (see the dichotomy centre-periphery), also emerges from the subaltern margins and in resistance. This promotes non-hegemonic relationalities where the right to the city does not mean mere access to consumption or property, but the collective right to habitability,

to re-appropriate and to affirmatively infrastructure (as a verb, not a noun), based on dissent. The city then becomes an exercise of re-imagination and radical onto-aesthetic re-materialisation through the proliferation of encounters with the minor, the everyday and the historically silenced (under-commons). To this end, participatory art is a privileged vehicle that contributes to create alternative imaginaries and narratives, common “fugitive worlds” (Harney & Motten, 2013) from excluded points of view and through (geographical and political) “peripheral” experiences: from and with objects, but also from and with those “others” that have historically been treated as objects.

4. Art and artistic research then contribute to re-materialise and feel the city, aesthetically, ethically, and politically, by creating atmospheres and sensorial experiences that enable a collective encounter between people and things. This artistic experimentation, far from the logocentrism of social analysis, does not seek to explain or represent the city but to sensitize the multiple bodies that co-inhabit it to facilitate the interconnectivity between them, between the living and the inert that constitute the urban tissue. From an affective materialist perspective, and this is one of the book’s major contributions, the various sensitive experiences proposed in each chapter function as artistic and experimental epistemic repertoires that attend to elements, dimensions, and issues – matters: materials and problems – that had previously been unappreciated. And, as a result, they can describe and perform the city, in order to speculate with/about it and thus open up other urban possibilities (at ontological, political, ethical, and aesthetic levels), that were not even thinkable.

Visual Participatory Arts based Research, and this is the most original contribution of the volume, thus becomes a speculative process of vital research and knowledge production FROM/WITH/ABOUT the city that creates collective events from which relations, affections, and sensations between bodies,

spaces, and urban objects are intensified. And, from this vitalist materiality, this book contributes to expand, displace, and redistribute the sensitive in order to problematize and re-inhabit the city by other (artistic) means.

Although all the experiences of artistic research presented in the book are based on specific cities affected by different problems, perhaps the best “reading” we can make of this work is to place it in dialogue with the different cities we inhabit and their contemporary problems. For example, if we situate ourselves in a city like Barcelona, inhabited by 1,656,725 people and 77,000 pets, which has suffered water restrictions since March, 2 this year and was visited by 9.7 million tourists in 2022 (who consume 5 times more water than any neighbour of the city), where there is a crisis of access to housing due to the touristification of the city, or where there are certain infrastructural limits (in terms of water, energy and transport)... How can experiences of research based on participatory visual art help

to make the city more habitable for everyone, outside of productivism and neoliberal logics? How to re-sensitize neighbours and visitors, but also municipal stakeholders and politicians, to the effects and affections of their inhabiting and transiting the city? How to articulate the interests and needs of permanent and floating populations? How can art and artistic research cultivate and promote radical forms of habitability, composition and re-spatialization that are more just for all, human and non-human? Or what would an institution like the “Municipal Office of Urban Ecology” look like (or how to generate common political infrastructures?), by incorporating visual and collaborative art-based research as part of its methodological repertoire? Because perhaps not everything is articulable or composable, but art and artistic research, as the book argues, might be a powerful tool and means to make appreciable and tangible, common matters that beset us at a time of ecological and economic crisis where cities, historically active agents of such crises, urgently need to rethink and remake themselves.

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